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by
Jennifer Lynde Barker

"Evolution has produced an astonishing variety of living creatures. But none compel more respect and admiration than the Felidae." Thus declares Pascal, a character in the animated film *Felidae.* Directed by Michael Schaack and released in 1994, *Felidae* is a unique mixture of 1950s noir, 1930s horror, and an abundance of catitude. Felidae is another term for cats—both wild and domestic—and the film focuses almost entirely on four-legged felines as they enact a grim tale of mass murder and twisted genetic engineering ambitions. There are not many films that focus their plot on eugenics (*Gattaca* and *Never Let Me Go* come to mind), and an even smaller number of those are animated. In fact, *Felidae* may be the only animated film that specifically plays out the Nazi drama of methodically creating a pure breed through selective slaughter in the animal world. As such, it is a film that showcases graphic violence in a way unusual for animation at the time. That the film chooses to tell its story with cats as the main characters also gives it an allegorical edge that puts it on a par with Halas and Batchelor's adaption of George Orwell's iconic *Animal Farm* (1954). And though *Felidae* is not a satire proper, it delivers a biting indictment of the horrors of eugenics and scientific racism.

*Felidae* follows the adventures of the dapper Francis (voiced by Ulrich Tukur), a smart and stylish cat who is forced to constantly move—an activity he hates—with his owner (or "partner" in cat lingo) Gustav

(Manfred Steffen). Gustav is an archeologist who specializes in Egyptian divinities but supports the two of them by writing trash fiction. Thus, Francis is an immigrant and an outsider in his new neighborhood—a position that makes him an ideal observer in the story. This aligns him well with the role of detective as he soon discovers that mystery and murder are afoot. He quickly becomes enmeshed in a byzantine plot that references both ancient Egypt and Nazi Germany, much like *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981)! He soon teams up with Blaubart (Bluebeard), voiced by the legendary Mario Adorf (a role written with him in mind, according to the director). Blaubart is a grumpy, bobtailed, and battered but very charming old cat who becomes his comedic sidekick as they discover one dead and mangled body after another. The two also consult local cat genius Pascal (voiced by Klaus Maria Brandauer) as they investigate and dismiss suspects, and Francis searches for clues in the neighborhood and in a series of surreal dreams. A religious cult, cat gangs, mad scientists, and rampant feline sex expand the drama and danger as the various plots gradually converge into a spectacular finish.

Based on the book *Felidae* (1989) by German-Turkish writer Akif Pirinçci, the film was adapted for the screen by Martin Kluger and Pirinçci. It was produced and directed in Hamburg, Germany, with a select group of roughly 150 animators brought in from various countries, as well as partnership with studios in Ireland, England, Canada, and South Korea. Anne Dudley (of Art of Noise) composed the soundtrack with an unexpected theme song by Boy George. In Deaf Crocodile's interviews with director Michael Schaack and key crew—Paul Bolger (animation supervisor and character designer), Bernie Denk (animation director), Eamon Butler (animation supervisor), Doug Bennett (lead animator), and Des Downes (art director)—they make clear the ambitious nature of the project. *Felidae* was an outlier at the time in the German animation industry—not only for being a feature film (and the most expensive animation production to date) but for tackling a dark and violent story through the medium of animal-centric animation. Schaack had directed comedic animation previously with *Werner – Beinhart!* (1990) and

*The Little Punk* (1992), but he, like the rest of the crew, embraced the opportunity to work on a truly "adult" animation. The crew was given free rein to adapt the adult subject matter of the book—Bernie Denk joked that the direction was "More blood! More blood!" The result was riveting for some and shocking for others, and while the film was not successful at the time, and an experiment that would not be repeated, it remains a cult favorite.

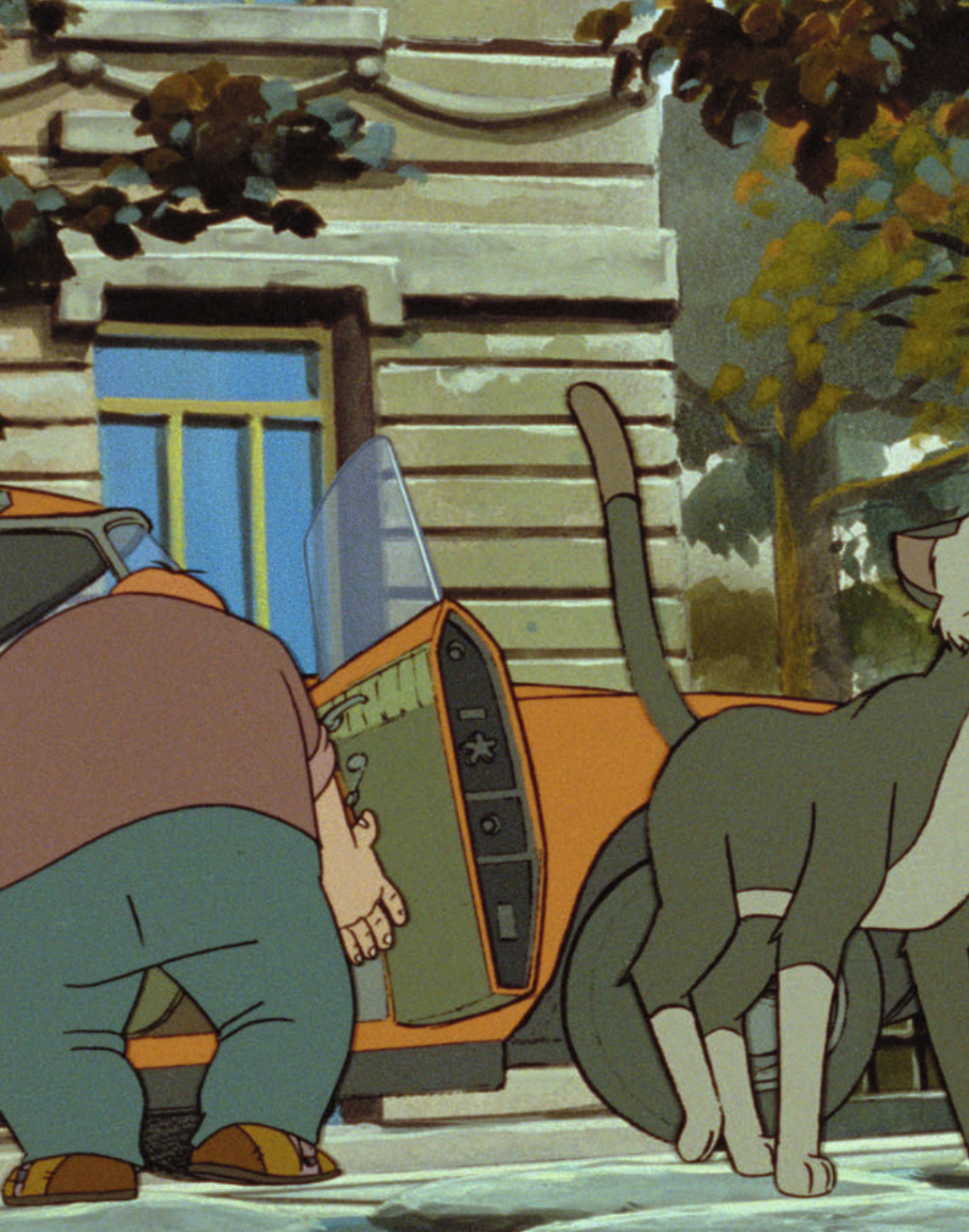
Adult animation already existed at the time, but it was uncommon and generally focused on human characters. The rise of adult animation co-existed with the explosion of graphic sex and violence into the mainstream film world beginning in the late 1960s and maturing throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, with a renewed and enhanced depth in the 1990s. In animation, films like the Animerama trilogy by Osamu Tezuka and Eiichi Yamamoto—including *A Thousand and One Nights* (1969), *Cleopatra* (1970) and *Belladonna of Sadness* (1973)—and René Laloux's *Fantastic Planet* (1973) focused on sexuality and adult themes. *Heavy Metal* (1981), *Pink Floyd: The Wall* (1982), *Akira* (1988), and others further pushed the envelope of adult animation possibilities and increased the level of violence. But it was in the 1990s that adult animation took off. In addition to *Felidae, Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Perfect Blue* (1997) tapped into the neo-noir and sci-fi genres, paving the way for anime to follow. The debut of *South Park* (1997) also saw the beginnings of a contemporary adult animation explosion on television that continues to this day.

There were two major precursors to *Felidae* that featured cats as main characters: Ralph Bakshi's *Fritz the Cat* (1972)—an independent film based on Robert Crumb's comic strip—and *Cat City*, a Hungarian sci fi parody film directed by Béla Ternovszky in 1986. Bakshi directed more adult animation in the 1970s, including *Heavy Traffic* (1973) and *Coonskin* (1975), before turning to fantasy (including *The Lord of the Rings* in 1978), but *Fritz* was his only feature told with animals—although they were really just humans in disguise. The same may be said of *Cat City*, which actually focuses more on mice. *Felidae*, on the other hand, genuinely depicts a

feline world in opposition to the human one and features a realistic rather than cartoonish aesthetic. In that sense it is closer to *Watership Down* (1978) and *Plague Dogs* (1982)—both directed by Martin Rosen and based on books by Richard Adams—which feature adult themes and animals as main characters. While they did not go nearly as far as *Felidae*, there was similar confusion amongst viewers about how to read them tonally. The combination of animal fantasy and horror is rare, and in the interview, Paul Bolger aptly refers to *Felidae* as "psycho Disney."

While the story is dark, the animation thus interestingly borrows from the traditions of Disney and Don Bluth Productions. Many animators working on *Felidae* had worked with these studios (especially as Bluth moved his studio to Ireland) and learned their craft while doing so. Films like Disney's *The Aristocats* (1970), *Robin Hood* (1973), and *The Rescuers* (1977) and Bluth's *An American Tail* (1986) focused on animals as main characters involved in activities similar to humans that featured danger and adventure, though in a milder way. *The Aristocats* (1970) even targets a feline world—but while there is a kitten kidnapping and the threat of murder, the film clearly includes children as its intended audience. There is even a joke about it in *Felidae*, acknowledging that the two films are very different animals. Bluth's *The Secret of NIMH* (1982) takes a bleaker approach and similarly decries the abuse and vivisection of animals by humans while creating empathy for them through personification, though without the graphic visuals and a lighter tone. Finally, some dark fantasy puppet tales, like Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal* (1982) and *Labyrinth* (1986), also tell a "children's" story set in a world that features violent and disturbing elements, harkening back to the classic Grimm fairy tales. Yet even so, *Felidae* is clearly on another level from them all.

Like most of the films just mentioned, or indeed more recent films like *Ernest & Celestine* (2012), *Felidae* engages in intriguing worldbuilding for non-human species. Cats take center stage and many breeds and personalities are featured. Francis is a domestic shorthair, a non-pedigreed or mixed-breed cat, which places him at the whim of natural selection



rather than the constructed results of pure-breed cats. He's bicolor, a grey tuxedo cat, which fits his personality: restrained yet distinctive. The gruff Blaubart appears to be the most typically cat-like of the cast as he is constantly sidetracked by thoughts of delicious fish, not to mention a preoccupation with marking his territory, and his desire for a good nap. Other cat characters represent a variety of types and breeds (from Persian to Havana Brown) and the cats who have had the most negative contact with humans—and who have transformed accordingly—are those who have outgrown the confines of feline dimension and appear more like bulldogs. The brutal Kong (voiced by Wolfgang Hess) is an immense cat who harasses the others while Joker (voiced by Ulrich Wildgruber), equally huge, takes out his traumatic past on the devotees of a religious sect he leads. And while there are humans in the film, they are rarely in view. Rather, their presence is vaguely nurturing or controlling, or in the case of Professor Julius Preterius (voiced by Gerhard Garbers), highly destructive.

The story continually immerses the narrative in a non-human perspective, including cat-specific language (calling humans "can-openers" for example). The animators skillfully reinforce the narrative focus of the film by drawing things from a cat's point of view—very close to the ground and fluid. The spatial orientation of the film keeps its vision feline and this provides an overall sense of the authenticity and plausibility of the story. In their interviews with Deaf Crocodile, the director and crew noted that they worked hard studying real models (like *Tiger on the Tiles* and Eadweard Muybridge's photographic studies of cats) to create a unique yet realistic look for the cats and their movements. Naming the artwork of Sebastian Kruger as an influence, they created a more angular look for the cats, minimizing fur into lines that could be more effectively animated. Their detailed study is evident throughout—from chase scenes to moments of relaxation and play. The cinematography of the film, which often feels like live action filmmaking—including close-ups, elevated shots, panning, and multiplate work—further emphasizes the veracity of the scenario and story.

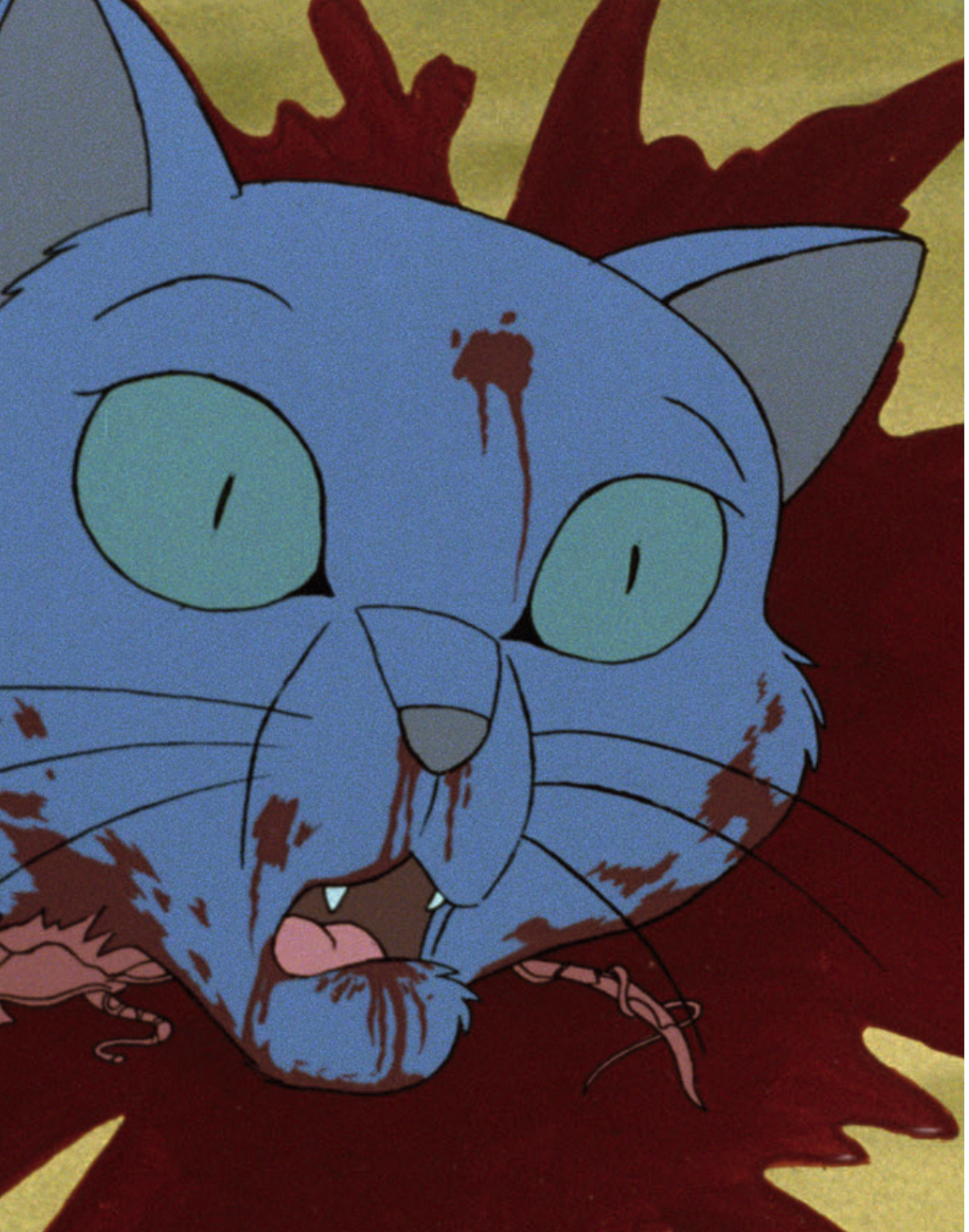
The film's realism channels the grittiness of film noir in its narrative and realistic aesthetic—not a photorealistic one, but without the cartoonish elements that even movies like *Fritz the Cat* employed. *Felidae* includes numerous film noir conventions from the 1940s-1950s as well as the neo-noir style that resurfaced and thrived in the 1990s: grisly murders that revolve around sex, dark settings, moral ambiguity and mystery, hapless victims, dead informants, escalating body counts, cynicism and corrupt authorities, gangsters, nighttime sleuthing, chase sequences, and a detective and femme fatale. Even the surreal dreams recall Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and *Spellbound* (1945), with their Freudian noir motifs. The sequence in which we are introduced to the elegant but ill-fated Felicitas (voiced by Mona Seefried) is a good example. She is blind but brave—and her backstory adds an element of horror as she recalls being blinded by a human when she was a kitten. She is a star witness as she has heard the death cries of the victims as well as the voice of the murderer. But when Felicitas is murdered less than an hour after seeing Francis it becomes clear that he is a primary catalyst in the game and the killer knows him. This attack underscores the collateral damage of investigation. Her death is particularly grisly and personal—not only is her throat ripped apart, she is completely decapitated, making her a singular victim in terms of the crime's vehemence and the fact that she doesn't fit the bill as far as the other targets go—they were males in heat.

The stark atmosphere of the film also owes much to the use of horror genre conventions and motifs. Gustav and Francis essentially move into a haunted house, its toxic green walls a prescient sign of the scientific experimentation it conceals. Like all haunted houses, this one is falling apart, permeated by odd and disgusting smells, mysterious stains on the floors and walls, and a perverse and violent past. Gustav, the archeologist, sees it as a place to renovate—like a good post-war German, he is remaking the past; while Francis, the detective, sees it as a place still saturated with evil things. Highlighting this danger are spiders eating prey, somber crows, canted angles, bloody skies, and zooming camerawork, with even the ground level camera (cat's POV) serving to disorient the

viewer. The film features some dark and stormy nights that augment the gothic setting with ominous lighting, twisted trees, and foggy streets setting a bleak tone while also obscuring the human world. The haunted house was always a popular setting in early animation, which played with ideas of horror in a mocking way. Thus, *Felidae* brings to mind 1930s Fleischer and Disney films, with their often macabre and surreal tonality—but without their humor, deflection, or absurdity.

The dream sequences are darker and more chilling. They present the past to Francis in a sequence of three surreal riddles. The first features a mad scientist, a faceless revenant who is later revealed as the former doctor of the house. To the somber tones of Mahler's Resurrection Symphony, Francis walks through portals into an abstract brightness that allows for the unraveling of shadows into chains, and transports them both back into the scene of the original crime, where Preterius experimented on cats. No doubt his name is a reference to Dr. Pretorius in *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), another mad scientist intent on creating a new breed of tiny humans. Francis wakes from this hellish inferno to discover from Blaubart that there has been another murder. When Francis later discovers the doctor's old lab, he calls it "Frankenstein's laboratory. Or much, much worse!" Just as in *Frankenstein* (1931), the doctor toys with the boundaries between life and death with the fetish of electricity. Electricity is mirrored later in the film when Joker, as high priest, electrocutes members of his religious cult as a way of reenacting the original trauma of their prophet, Claudandus. Thus, occult religious rituals and scientific zealotry merge, showcasing how easy it is for the irrational to take charge when ideas become obsessive.

Francis drifts into another nightmare soon after the death of Felicitas, and we follow a camera tracking a crow to a massive field that undulates with the corpses of cats. Bursting forth from this frightening landscape is Gregor Mendel, geneticist and abbot, whose painting Francis has seen in Pascal's house. Mendel talks to him about Felidae and crossbreeding, and urges Francis to consider Claudandus while he puppeteers rotting

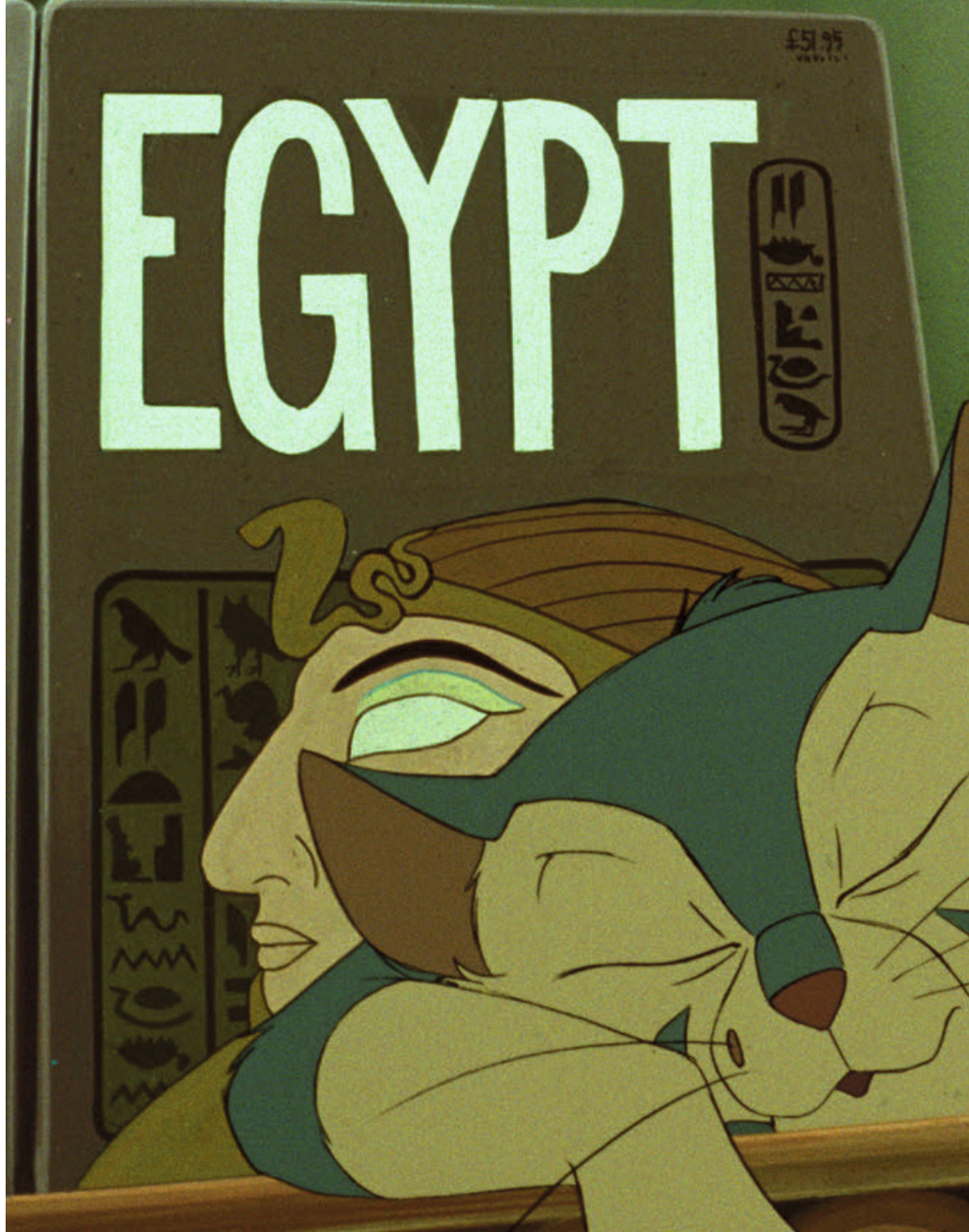


carcasses and tosses them about. This sequence channels the kind of animation featured in *Pink Floyd - The Wall* and brings to mind the darkest moments of *Watership Down* (1978). It also foreshadows Francis's discovery of the catacombs where hundreds of dead cats are buried. It amplifies the level of horror in the film towards genocide, and indeed, the plot that Francis discovers is an attempt to obliterate the future of impure cat breeds. Soon Francis discovers a video by accident, and sees the grim practices of Professor Preterius in the lab, which involved the horrific torture and death of many cats in the pursuit of a medical adhesive for tissues. It is here that Claudandus, whose mutation allows him to tolerate the injections, is born as fact and legend. He even appears like Frankenstein's monster, wrapped in bandages, a "new breed" born from scientific ambitions, pain, and chance. As Preterius descends into drunken madness, his fixation turns to breeding cats from Claudandus into a super race.

It is both ironic and unfortunate that Pirinçci has become notorious for hate speech about immigrants and the Holocaust in the last ten years. *Felidae* was a best-selling book in a crime fiction series about cat detectives that included seven more novels, but now his books are essentially banned. The books, written long ago, are clearly opposed to the ideas he now advocates, and the film could not be more thorough in its rejection of the concepts of purity through selective genetic engineering and its advocacy of the importance of immigrant perspectives. It even focuses on a specifically German post-WWII point of view. Gustav, typical of many Germans in that period, doesn't see that the house is toxic with past crimes, nor does he sense the terrible tragedy still taking place around him. This is left to Francis, the reluctant migrant who is uprooted and transplanted against his desires and whose eyes and ears are open. He is initially fooled as to the true identity of the super-intelligent Pascal (seemingly named after the famous French mathematician and philosopher), but wonders at his singular ability to use a computer. He also appreciates at first Pascal's obsessive tracking of the local cat population, but finally uncovers its true purpose: as a warped catalog of breeds and procreative potential.

Pascal has a smooth, urbane voice (the well-cast Klaus Maria Brandauer) that conceals a deep psychosis, a perfect voice to convey the dual identity of Pascal/Claudandus. His veiled villainy is the heart of the film's critique—a portrayal of the fascist character and voice as seemingly reasonable, systematic, rationale, and curious, while in fact being delusional, obsessive, brutal, and merciless. Pascal's computer catalog of the local cats includes their races (breeds) with notes that are highly biased: of Benjamin (recently deceased) he writes: "multiple warnings! DANGEROUS! Mates with all." Some are threatening "Mixed breed" types while others are jokes: the cat "Abba" is "arrogant, very musical, absolutely harmless." In his analysis the cats are either neutered and impotent or dangerous womanizers, a clue to his reason for killing. Breeding becomes a clear theme of the film when Francis finds the dead Solitaire, her unborn kittens ripped out of her stomach in a particularly tragic and graphic image. Kong, her mate, mistakes the elderly and decrepit Jesaja (voiced by Helge Schneider) for the killer and the ensuing chase leads to the discovery of the catacombs. Jesaja calls himself the "Guardian of the Dead" and tells the myth of the Prophet while the dead cats around him are bathed in religious light and significance. He further corroborates that those in heat or pregnant make up the majority of the dead (450 to be exact) and that he (and Joker) were bred in the lab.

Inspired by a book on Egypt that he sleeps next to, Francis now has his final dream: he sees "Felidae"—an embodiment of the feline species, who calls himself Prophet and incites Francis to join him and the others in a magical place beyond death. This religious vision is soon mapped onto the breeding subplot. Francis wakes to the not-too-subtle meows of a female cat in heat calling his name. Nhozemphtekh (voiced by Michaela Amler) is one of the "new, old and different" breed that motivates so much slaughter in the film. A femme fatale in that sense, she looks something like the Caracal or Sand Cat—and her eyes are heavily lined in the Egyptian fashion. They enthusiastically mate but afterwards Blaubart informs him that her breed is wild and dangerous, and Claudandus is soon unmasked as the serial murderer and breeder of this perfect "killer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race." The story has been carefully building the dichotomy between natural cat behavior (Blaubart in particular) and cats with negative human influence. Claudandus confirms this corruption as he claims: "I had to kill… to preserve the racial purity of my primordial Felidae"—a select breed he hopes to lead into dominance over others. He says before he dies: "I became evil, Francis, but I once, too, was good." He pins his demise on human beings and their twisted relationship with the world and each other, a path that is corroborated by the scenes of his torture and "humanization" (including speaking to humans, cold-blooded murder, and the methodical use of technology to implement mass murder).

In the end, Francis destroys Claudandus/Pascal's work, finally laying to rest the legacy of Preterius. But the tormented cat's final words linger: "So much darkness in the world." So much so that the film ends with Francis's hopeful response: "Do not give up believing in a world in which animals and humans can live together in harmony." To which he impudently adds: "Of course, even types that are smarter than the latter. For example: Felidae!" He saunters off after Nhozemphtekh as the end credits roll, leaving us with the affirmation of harmony—at least between various races in the cat world. That the film can embrace both darkness and light is something that marks it as singular—the love child of *Animal Farm* and the *Aristocats*. Or maybe the really intense cousin of *The Secret of NIMH.* As such, *Felidae* remains an important milestone in the history of adult animation, and a compelling and timely story about how humans, and cats, should learn to live with each other.

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by
Walter Chaw

Michael Schaack's *Felidae* opens like *Spirited Away*: a child's dissociative nightmare of relocation, transplanting them from a place of safety and succor into a haunted space where their protests and warnings fall on deaf ears. A metaphor for immigrant populations? For pre-adolescence as it collides with experience and knowledge? All of that, but then the rest of it becomes a version of Barry Levinson's peculiar and underestimated *Young Sherlock Holmes* complete with origin story for a brilliant young detective, the bloom of first sexual love, and a battle against an arcane cult spreading its influence quietly through a twilit metropolis. *Felidae* is an animated film, a complex genre picture, and its heroes are a subculture existing beneath the immediate notice of an all-powerful, oft-hated, sometimes-adored ruling class meaning that it has its connections, too, to films like Fritz Lang's *M* and his *Dr. Mabuse* series or to Luis Feuillade's *Les Vampires* serial. Indeed, *Felidae* shares with Feuillade's work severed heads and hidden channels linking public spaces where clues are left and secrets obscured. The stars of *Felidae*, by the way, are cats, meaning that its touchstones for a western audience will be the "Nine Old Men" hand-drawn cel style of classic Disney pieces like *Lady and the Tramp* and *The Aristocats* (one character demurs "this ain't no Aristocats" in response to a particularly unsavory revelation in *Felidae*), or Don Bluth's nightmarish *The Secret of NIMH* (and by extension the social/rat experiments of John Calhoun), and, of course, Martin Rosen's devastating Richard Adams adaptations of *Watership Down* and *The Plague Dogs*.

Heady company and it would seem suggestive of more sociopolitical weight than one, brief, largely-forgotten film, animated no less for a western audience that largely sees animation as a child's genre rather than an elastic medium for complex storytelling, could manage. And yet *Felidae* proves itself the equal of its challenging, multifoliate fathers, not the least of which its co-writer, and author of the book upon which the film is based, Turkish-born German writer Akif Pirinçci. Pirinçci made himself a pariah after a withering xenophobic/homophobic speech for a far-right anti-Muslim organization called "Pegida" in October of 2015. His remarks sparked his publishers to immediately stop distribution of his work in Germany and the United States, including the eight novels of the *Felidae* series that found a significant German audience. I don't think they were popular because they were fantasies, I suspect they were popular because they are each Animal Farms, trenchant social satires holding a mirror darkly up to a German population forever-smarting from the tensions of its warring natures. Knowing what we know now, the sources for *Felidae*'s deep feelings of dislocation and paranoia seem obvious, starting with the suspicion of authoritarian overlords, the "can opener" humans of the piece who are largely disinterested in the lives of an underestimated and exploited proletariat beyond the pleasures they can provide them. When cats die in *Felidae*, and several do at the hand of what appears initially to be a serial murderer, they are beneath the notice of the godlike masters. The cats are left to save their own lives, or not. A scientist scoffs at one point about the possibility that he might ever run out of live specimens for his cruel experiments. Human society mourns dogs. Cats? They come and go. Enter our hero Francis (voiced by Ulrich Tukur), a tuxedo cat freshly deposited into the dark city by his "can opener," Gustav (Manfred Steffen), a struggling, porcine romance novelist who is affectionate enough, though insensible to the "chemical stench" of their new flat. Francis is unusually sensitive, it's true, but the inability for the can openers to sense their own corruption throughout becomes a running theme in *Felidae*.

I mention Francis' breed because race is of primary importance. Even among the cats there's a stratification drawn along racial lines. "What a rude question, what's my race," scolds femme fatale Nhozemphtekh (voiced by Michaela Amler), an Egyptian Mau who doesn't seem to know what she is, or is unwilling to divulge, sharing only that she is both an "old and new" breed. Francis soon discovers the body of a male cat, its throat torn out, and with the help of local brute Bluebeard (voiced by Mario Adorf), a battle-scarred Maine Coon who has survived years of medical experimentation, the two begin to unravel the mystery of several deaths that have plagued the area and a messianic cult worshiping a martyr called "Claudandus." The cult is led by Scottish Fold cat Joker (voiced by Ulrich Wildgruber), and their rituals involve ecstatic tests of pain, unquestioning obedience and howling devotions. Francis notes that the victims so far have been male and likely physically aroused at the moment of their death. He eventually comes to note that all of the slaughter likely leads back to a single traumatic event. This satisfies the *noir* trope of the male hero sexually addled by a predatory female, of course, and the Freudian foundations of much of analysis of the same. But in its graphic scatology, not shown but openly implied (these boys died with erections), the project takes on some of the profane obscenity of Umberto Eco's The Name of the Rose. It's a brilliant world-building gag. Cats are not in denial of themselves as sexual beings. They are not deluded by euphemism and entendre as human modesty demands. After fucking Nhozemphtekh in a graphic sequence mid-film, one that even provides the detail of a vaginal opening depicted as a messy, squiggle post-coitus versus the neat hole immediately prior, Schaack shows Francis cleaning himself carefully as Bluebeard complains about the sex-stench. The cats in this film are indictments of our own squeamishness about our carnality. Pirinçci wants to remind us that we are driven by the same base impulses. This sermon, *Felidae,* is mostly one of self-loathing and hypocrisy: the immigrant child essaying his adopted country and finding himself incapable of assimilating into a culture that will always only see him as a race with which he does not identify. Civilization has never been civilized. What am I? What a rude question.

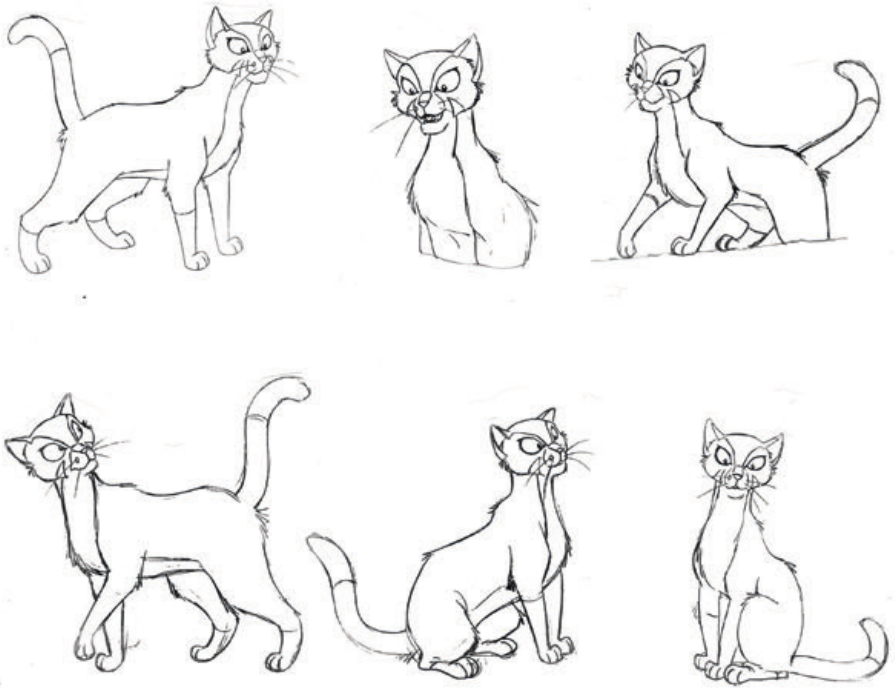
Francis meets a brilliant cat called Pascal (voiced by Klaus Maria Brandauer), a Havana Brown who has taught himself to use his master's computer in order to educate himself about the goings on of the Claudandus cult and its possible origins in a mad scientist's animal torture experiments. Pascal, named after a child math prodigy and revered proponent of the scientific method who ended his life a Jansenistic Catholic and author of a fideistic model for the separation of faith and science (if only his namesake cat had done the same). Pascal, embittered by his experiences at the hands of humans, becomes obsessed with the work of geneticist Gregor Mendel and hatches a scheme to breed a master race of genetically-pure cat that might one day, he hopes, overthrow humanity and free cats from their dependence upon them. For Pascal, it's a small stretch from manipulating pea sprouts to engineering an *Übermenschen* stripped entirely of the genetic modifications that domesticated, over centuries, a savage beast into ornamental companions. Into pets. The specter of Eugenics seems inevitable in *Felidae's* bleak worldview, but watch *how* it's introduced by Pirinçci and Schaack. About half an hour in, Francis has a vision of a squalid, dead brown world covered in decaying cat corpses with a monstrous Mendel (voiced by Christian Schneller) rising from the liquifying carrion clothed in priestly Catholic vestments (in honor of Mendel's profession as a monk?) and using giant wood crucifixes as a puppeteer's cross braces, animating the desiccated cadavers as foul marionettes for a grotesque wiggle before they disintegrate into their component, biological parts. It's a scene imagined by Gerald Scarfe on a Chaim Soutine bender. It is obscene and disgusting, a chimera made of an angry Christian god and science wielded without conscience. Naturally, the only recourse to such madness is an equally-genocidal response, isn't it? *Felidae* has no issues with its uncompromising depictions of meat and blood, sex and death and the consequences of hatred and intolerance. It has a point to make, that no matter how vile the provocation, there is no profit in an equivalent response. "There are no good men," Pascal says and so all men must die. Francis disagrees with him, not because he regards his own master as much more than a "can opener" who doesn't see him as a sentient being, but because he recognizes the zero sum game of allowing

trauma to dictate one's worldview as a binary choice between one or the other.

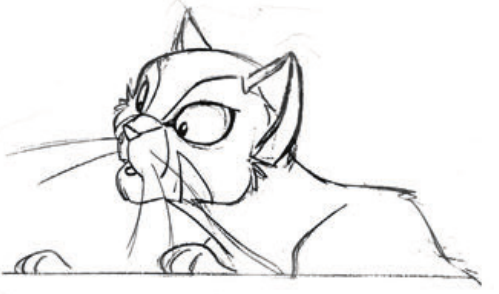
The last moments of the film depict a massive conflagration that consumes books, ancient artifacts, the notes Pascal has gathered in his genocidal pursuit, all means of history and the perpetuation of culture thrown into a bonfire. We should remember, too, that the mad scientist at the root of this community's derangement finally succeeds in creating a tincture that will instantly heal any wound - and is rent limb-from-limb for the method of his discovery before he can share it. Without reason, everything is marked as tinder and reduced to ash. The horror of absolutism is the fire in which we burn. What lingers for me is a brief interlude in the first third of the film when Francis falls through a skylight into the parlor of a blind cat, Felicity (voiced by Mona Seefried), a Russian Blue with *felicitous* feelings towards humans. They are a species she judges to be kind enough to take in a "crippled" creature like herself. She is essentially a figure of forgiveness, blinded by the humans she credits with her salvation and free of self-pity and its attendant self-hate. The first genuinely nasty surprise of *Felidae* is the revelation that in the next scene Felicity has been brutally murdered, decapitated, off-screen, possibly for the crime of telling Francis about the Claudandus cult but actually as a gambit of the killer to throw Francis off the scent. What if the victims *aren't* all tomcats in heat? I think Felicity is killed because she is capable of empathy and forgiveness. She represents a threat to any broken, perverse extremist whose greatest existential fear is to accidentally discover a recognizable humanity in their embellished boogeymen. In order to wipe out another, one must first smother their own empathy for the other. *Felidae* is brutal and productively-nauseating, an evergreen reminder of the terrible things we do to each other and the ways we justify our bestial savagery through nationalism, racism and religion. *Felidae* should be taught in school. Not grammar school, maybe high school after we've already spent our childhoods being beaten into obedience and the acceptance of abomination. It's strong medicine but it might already be too late for the curative it could provide.

Walter Chaw is Senior Film Critic for FilmFreakCentral.net. He has bylines in the *NY Times, Washington Post, Criterion, The LA Weekly, NY Post's Decider, NY Magazine's Vulture*, and is an occasional guest on NPR's "Pop Culture Happy Hour." He has written a monograph on *Miracle Mile* and a critical study of the career of Walter Hill called "A WALTER HILL FILM."

# Character Designs courtesy of Paul Bolger



FRANCIS



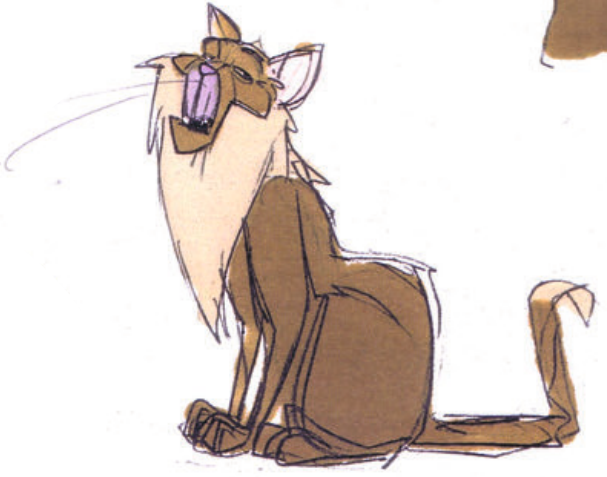
PASCAL...!
PROPOSAL...1
SHOULD BE MORE ANGULAR + LESS CUTE(?!)
I'M TOO LIKE A DOW BLUTH DESIGN!

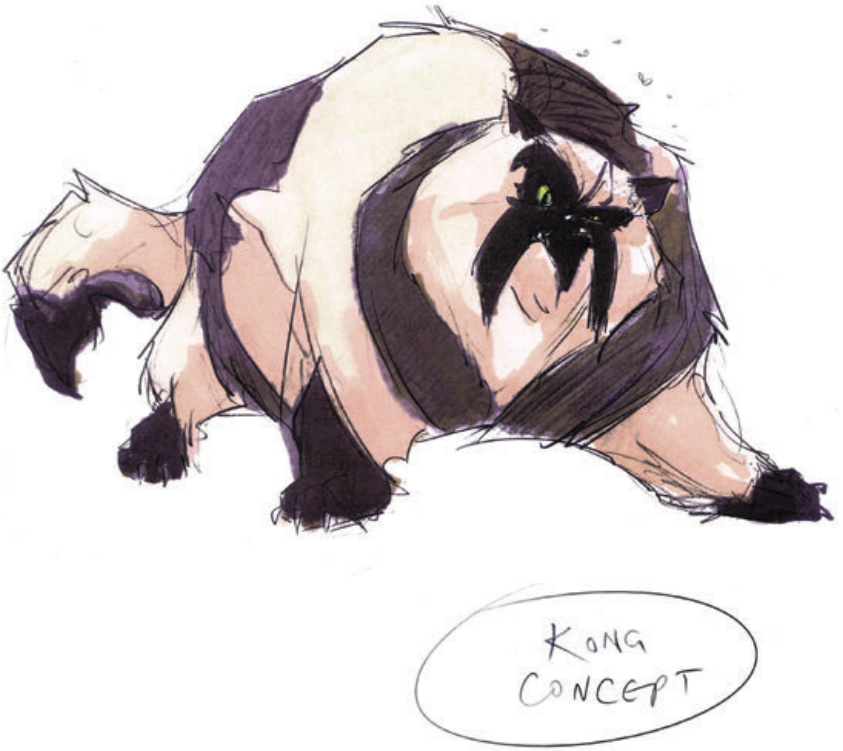
I'M KINDA TOO BLUTHEY... DON'T YA THINK?

PASCAL ?!

PROPOSAL 2...

PASCAL PROPOSAL 3

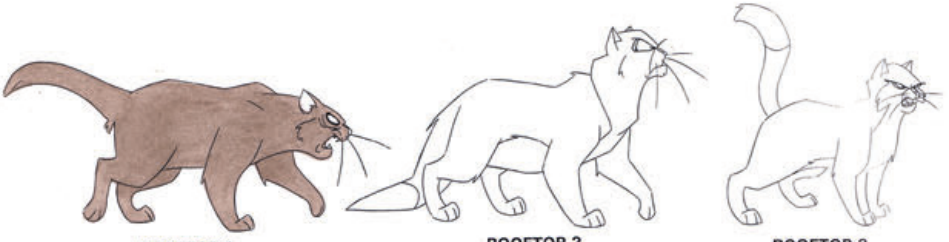



KONG
CONCEPT

THE HERMANNS
- ORIGINAL DESIGN -
NOT TO BE CONSIDERED...!

**KONG**
**VERSUS**
**FRANCIS**

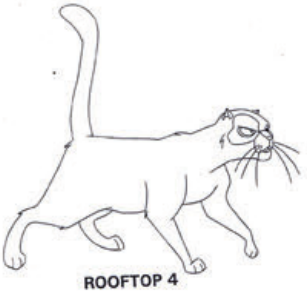
CLAUDANDUS
(YOUNG PASCAL)



ROOFTOP 1

ROOFTOP 2

ROOFTOP 3



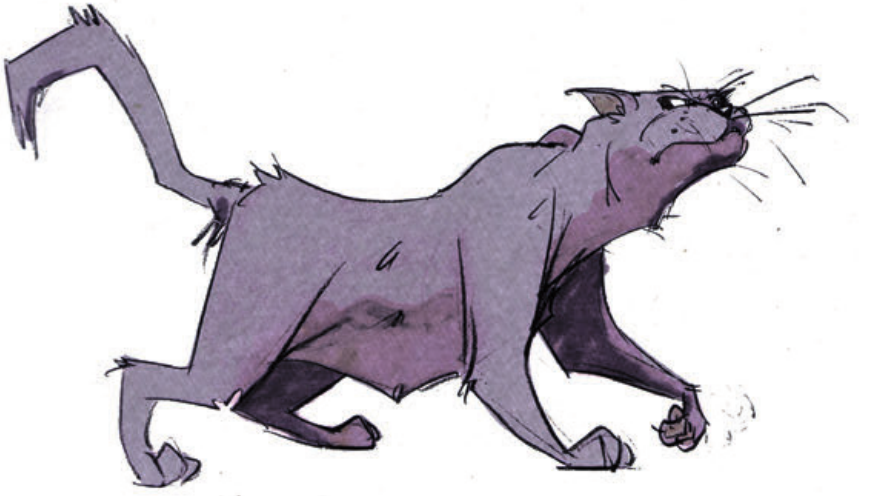
ROOFTOP 4

ROOFTOP 5

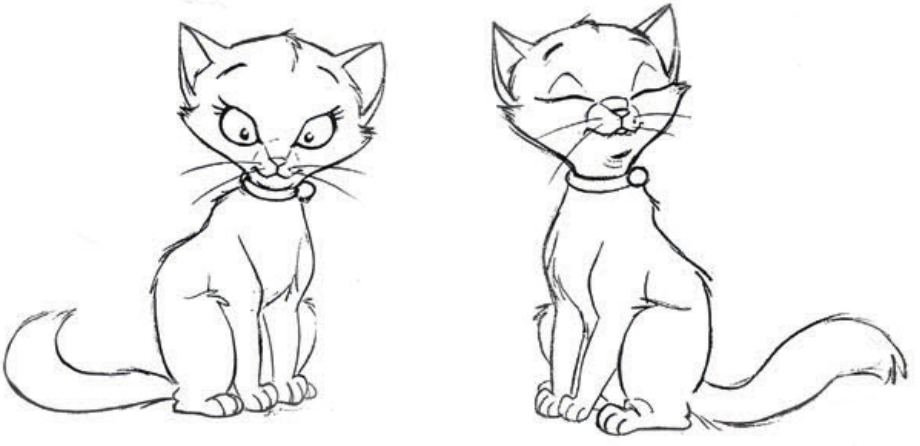
ROOFTOP 6

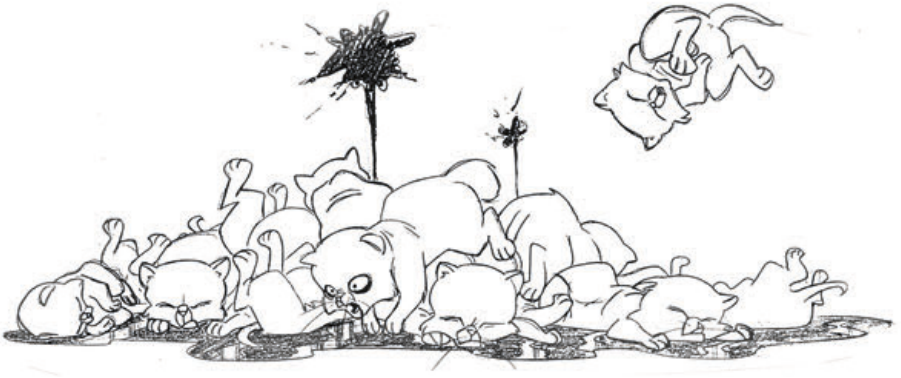
RAT

Deep Purple



KITTENS





## EARLY FRANCIS CONCEPTS

***FRANCIS***

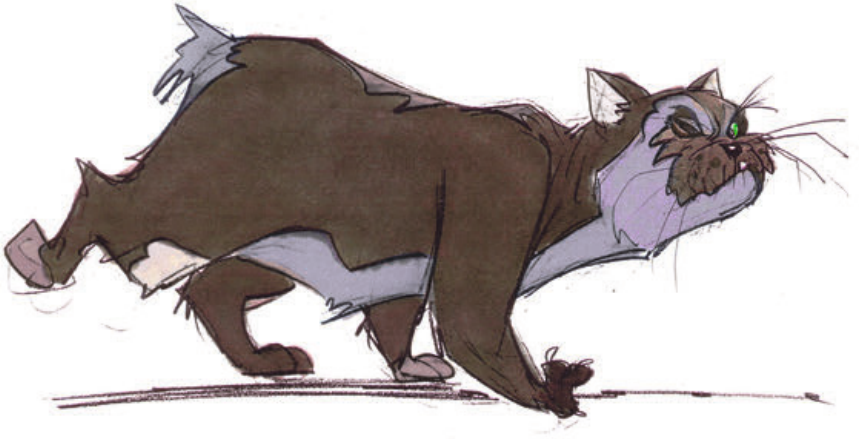
**expressions**
**SHEET TWO**

## FRANCIS

expressions 1

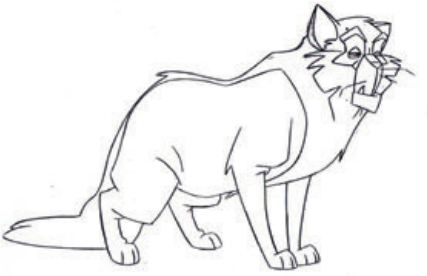
**BLUEBEARD**

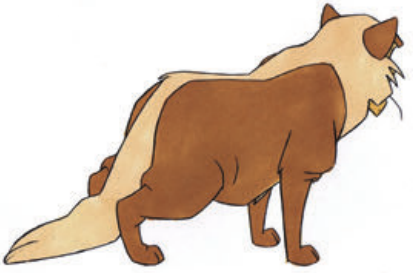
**CONCEPT**



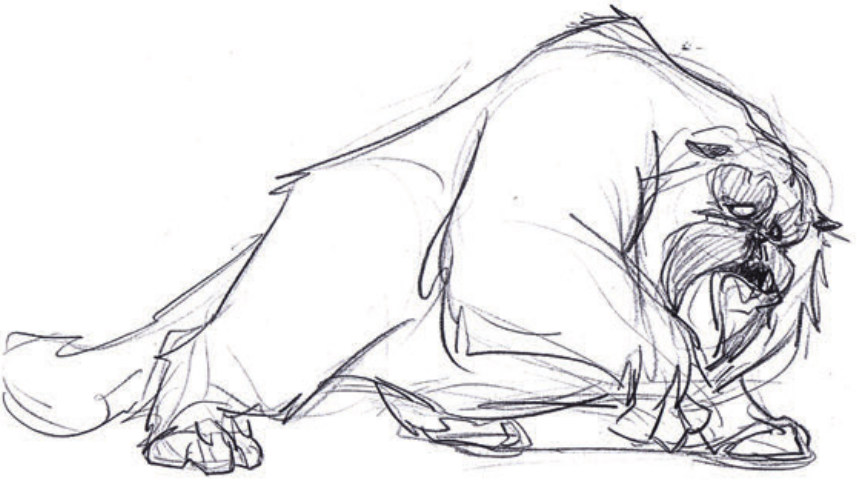
## BLUEBEARD

**PASCAL**

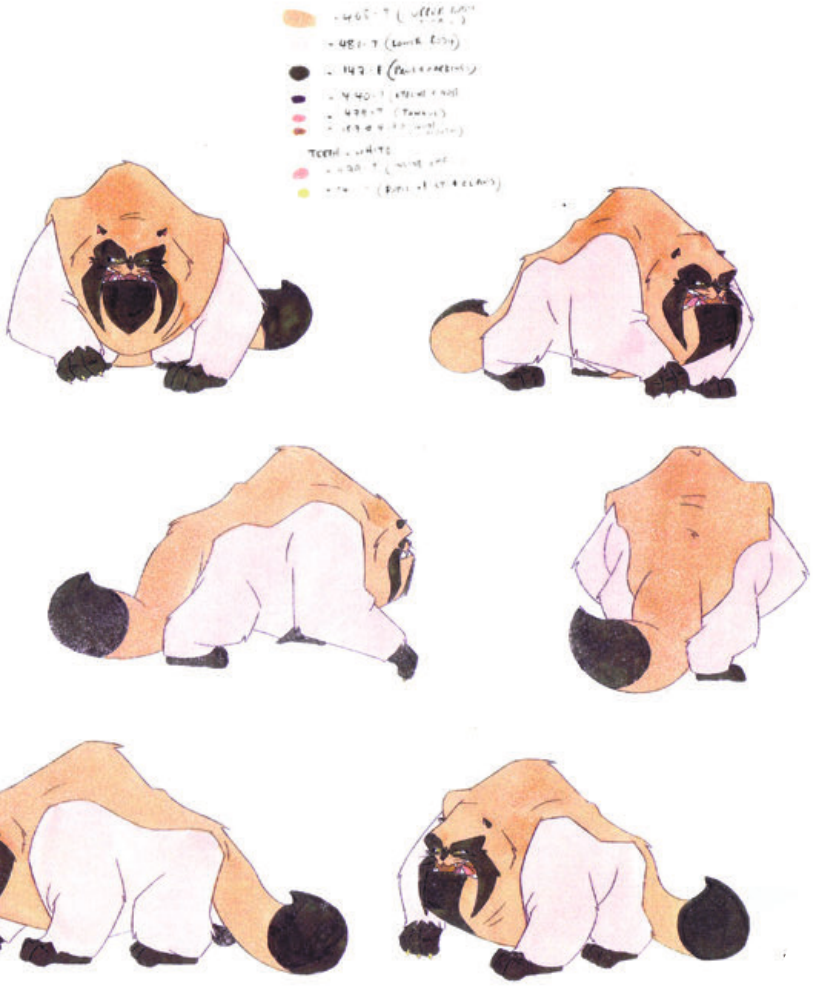




KONG!



# KONG



# KONG

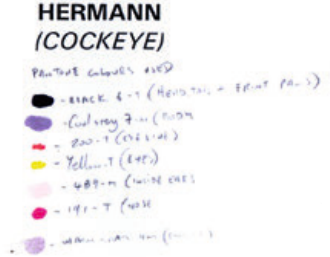
**SHEET TWO**

**expressions**

for animators` use only

· THE HERMANNS ·
· SUGGESTION # 1 ·

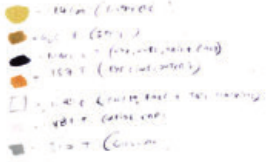
**HERMANN**
*(COCKEYE)*

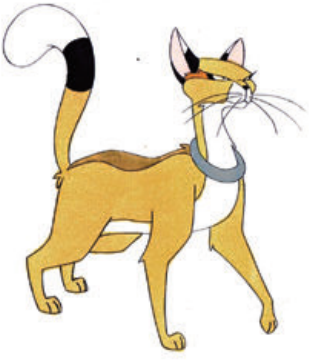


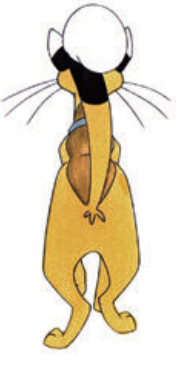
## FELICITAS

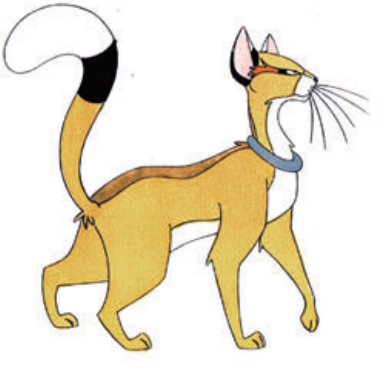
PANTONE
COLOURS
- 542 M (BODY)
- 141-T (EYES)
- 141-T +2 (OUTLINE)
- 457 (NOSE)
- 191-T (LIPS)
- 1625-T (NOSE RIMS)

**NHOZEMPTHEKH**

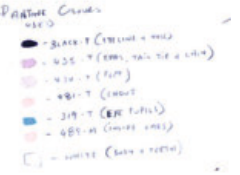


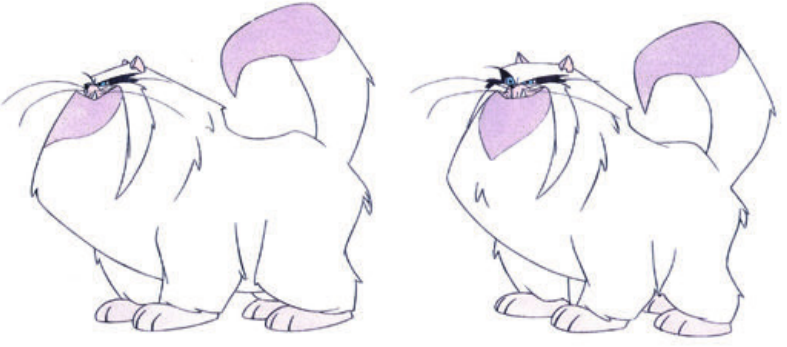






## JOKER





Joker
A SMALLER, WILTIER & CLEANER
VERSION OF KING - ONLY OLDER

**JESAJA**

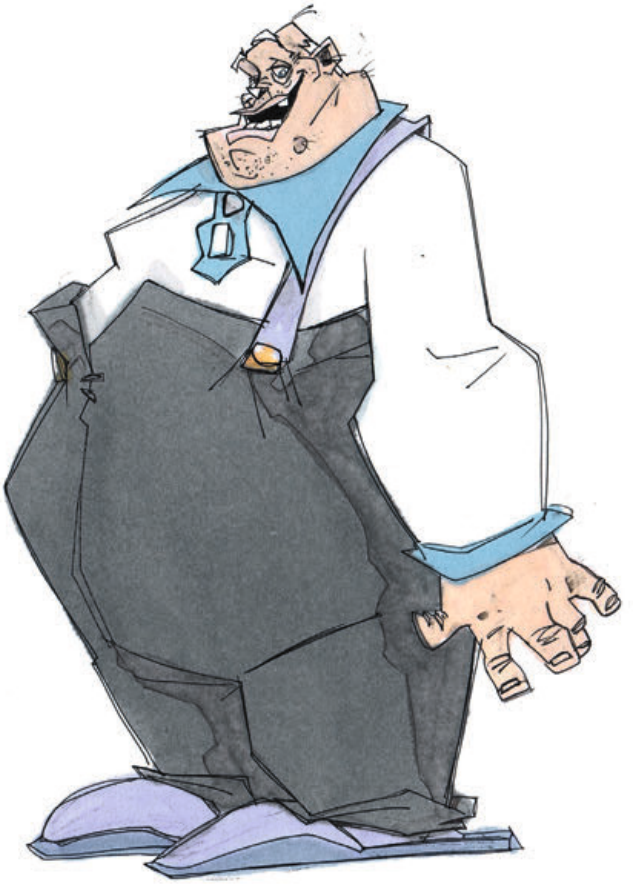
**EARLY CONCEPT**

Rooftop Cats

**GUSTAV & FRANCIS**

**EARLY CONCEPT**

## EARLY GUSTAV CONCEPT



## MORE GRAPHIC STYLE

Notes on the Restoration from Craig Rogers of Deaf Crocodile:

FELIDAE was restored from brand new 4K scans of the original 35mm camera negatives and sound elements. The source elements had been stored away since the film's first release. Minor shrinking of the negative had occurred over the past 30 years and the cans had the telltale scent of "vinegar syndrome" deterioration - the chemical breakdown of the film elements. A sign that they had unfortunately not spent all of those 30 years in proper temperature and humidity controlled conditions.

Our guiding philosophy in film restoration is to always try to make the film look like an opening night show print (that is one struck from the OCN). It should always still look like a film presentation. That can lead to questions of what to fix and what not to fix. This is especially true with vintage animation. When faced with these questions we need to ask other questions. Was this "problem" due to a limitation of technology at the time? How distracting is this from the overall presentation? Does making the fix overtly change the aesthetic of the whole?

One such question came up in the restoration of FELIDAE. Much to our delight both the optical dupe negative titles as well as the original "clean" 35mm OCN had been kept for Reel 1. This is how they create multiple different language versions for titles. It's rare however that we have access to the original source 35mm backgrounds. Typically the OCN background is combined optically with the titles and that resulting new duplicate negative is then cut into the reel. This results in a dramatic loss in picture quality during the opening titles. I'm sure you've noticed the jump in picture quality once the opening credits are finished when watching a film. In this case we did have the OCN backgrounds. We've opted to use the OCN backgrounds and carefully recreate the titles digitally so that they match the original presentation, but retain the beautiful 35mm OCN picture quality of the rest of the film.

Another issue when restoring vintage animation is what to do about the inevitable built-in "legacy" dust that was photographed in the production of making the film. Each frame of vintage animation is made up of typically two or more layers of hand painted cel animation. Each layer of these cels can have dust on them. Add more layers - add more dust. Compounding the problem is that animation is typically double photographed. That is, most cels are photographed twice. When backgrounds aren't swapped out, any dust on those can show up on frames 2,4,6...20 frames in a row! Given how digital dust removal software works in addition to the philosophical question of what to fix or not fix - it leaves one with a decision to make. Do we remove that built-in dust or not? It was part of the original photography, but it can also be quite distracting. We decided to split the difference. Most of the built-in "legacy" dust is left alone. We've only gone in and removed or reduced that photographed dust when it became overly distracting to the scene.

HDR color grading of vintage films leaves other philosophical questions as well. Similarly to the picture clean up, we try to opt for what looks right for the film, its style, the period, etc. When making grading adjustments the most common note has been "The HDR is too much here. It distracts from the whole. Dial it back." We're acutely aware that this is cel animation from 1994 and have tried to find a balance between that vintage look and what is possible with HDR grading and modern televisions. We think you'll be blown away by FELIDAE. It's been a blast to work on.

Lastly, a fun "easter egg" for you. There's a single frame in the film where a small insect landed on the cel as it was photographed. We left him there. It was the little guy's 24th of a second of fame. Why take that away from him?

Standing l-r: Stephen Reid, Sam Pouch, Darren Power, Doug Bennett, Ray Woods, Eamonn Butler, Rob Gott, Anthony Power, Niall O'Loughlin, Clive Bolger, Paul Bolger, Michael Kiely, Connor Flynn

DAGDA FELIDAE FILM CREW, DUBLIN

Seated l-r: Gavin Murphy, Nicola Flynn, June Bennett, Chris York, Noelle Quinn, Laura Mythen, Michael Boylan, Paul Fogerty, Karin Nielsen, Jason Ryan , Karen Scanlon, John Walsh

Taken in April, 1994. Photo courtesy of Paul Bolger.

Special Thanks to:

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Will Dodson
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Sonopress
David Mackenzie
Anna Kaperska

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